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ABSTRACT

Financial, educational, and political accountability issues involved in the Disadvantaged Schools Program, initiated by the Schools Commission to improve the learning outcomes of children from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds in Australia, are the focus of this paper. Consideration is given to the views of the Commission in its published reports and to the relevance of those views for accountability procedures in the Program. The Program's emphasis on community involvement and school level evaluation as important aspects of educational accountability is examined, and strategies for facilitating accountability for the education of disadvantaged children are described. Strategies discussed deal with guidelines and consultant services, expansion of evaluation measures, training of teachers and community members in evaluation skills, and community participation. Finally, some of the constraints and tensions associated with accountability at all levels in the Program are discussed in relation to what may be possible in the future. Constraints examined involve developing accountability mechanisms, selection of schools, cost-effectiveness issues, over-emphasis on limited range of competencies, and conflicting goals. (CM)

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ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE EDUCATION OF DISADVANTAGED GROUPS THROUGH THE DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS PROGRAM

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ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE EDUCATION OF DISADVANTAGED GROUPS THROUGH THE DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS PROGRAM *

The purpose of this paper is to discuss some of the accountability issues involved in the Disadvantaged Schools Program of the Schools Commission. After a brief discussion of the notion of accountability, consideration is given to the views of the Commission in its published reports and to their relevance for accountability procedures in the Program. The Program's emphasis on community involvement and school level evaluation as important aspects of educational accountability is examined, and strategies for facilitating accountability for the education of disadvantaged children are described. Finally, some of the contraints and tensions associated with accountability at all levels in the Program are discussed in relation to what may be possible in the future.

INTRODUCTION

Increasing government involvement in the lives of Australian citizens, and provision of more government initiated and administered programs in the area of social services, has been accompanied by a growing demand for accountability: that is, accountability by government or its agencies for the tax-payers' money, a full and detailed explanation of what is being spent, on what projects, how and why funds are expended, and with what results. Education is only one of many areas subject to this kind of scrutiny.

Accountability is a concept which has been interpreted broadly as both giving account of funds, resources or services received and expended, and being responsible for their effective administration. In this paper three kinds of accountability are considered: financial, educational and political accountability. For the purpose of the paper the following definitions apply.

Financial accountability is the examination of expenditure in order to demonstrate that funds were used for the purpose or program for which they were specifically allocated. A financial audit concentrates on inputs rather than expected or actual outcomes. It determines whether financial operations are conducted with propriety, whether financial reports are presented fairly and whether the particular agency has complied with the applicable laws and regulations.

Educational accountability embraces efficiency, effectiveness and policy aspects. This determines whether an agency is managing or utilising its resources in an economical manner, whether the desired results or benefits are being achieved in educational terms through the implementation of policy objectives, and whether the priorities of these objectives are appropriate. Educational accountability can include evaluation, using techniques which involve both quantitative and qualitative measures.

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* The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author alone.

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Political accountability is the public acknowledgment of the direct relationship between the agency providing resources and the recipients. Continuation of financial support depends not only on financial and educational accountability, but also on awareness and publicising of the sources of finance.

This paper will give attention to each of these areas of accountability in relation to the Disadvantaged Schools Program, one of the specific purpose programs of the Schools Commission. Although the Commission has no comprehensive, definitive policy on accountability in the Program, an examination of its published reports reveals a broad view of the responsibility schools have to be educationally accountable to their clients, and system and school authorities have to be financially and politically accountable for grants received. A more detailed analysis of the Commission's approaches to the issue of accountability is given in Tannock's paper, also presented to this Conference.[1]

SCHOOLS COMMISSION'S VIEW OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Karmel Report

When the Interim Committee of the Australian Schools Commission reported to the Government in 1973 it recommended that:

> 'A condition of all Australian Government grants should be that the recipients of grants supply as required and in accordance with the Commission's requirements a financial accounting of all moneys received, certified by recognised auditors, and statistical returns on the use of human and material resources in the conduct of the schools for which the grants are made.'[2]

The Committee was concerned that there should be public financial accountability for all Commission grants, with published evidence that grants recommended for a specific purpose were indeed spent according to that purpose. It foreshadowed consultation with appropriate school authorities to establish a set of standard statistical forms to be completed, audited and returned annually to the Commission, not only to ensure public accountability but also to monitor the performance of schools and school systems. The Committee believed that non-government schools had a special responsibility to account publicly for the funds from the Government, and that money should be available only to those schools meeting certain specified standards. These would relate to qualifications of teachers, curriculum and physical facilities, and be assessed by visits from Commission officers as well as from statistical returns.

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1. Tannock P.D. The Schools Commission and aspects of accountability in Australian education. Paper presented to the Sixth National Conference, Australian Council for Educational Administration, Perth, 27 August, 1979.
2. Schools in Australia: Report of the Interim Committee of the Australian Schools Commission. Canberra, AGPS, 1973, para.13.20.

In addition to this view of financial and political accountability, the Commission drew attention to the notion of educational accountability through community involvement. It took the view that 'responsibility will be most effectively discharged where the people entrusted with making decisions are also the people responsible for carrying them out, with an obligation to justify them'.[3] The Commission also stated its belief that there is an obligation on teachers to explain to parents their educational programs.[4]

The 1976-78 Report

When reviewing the effectiveness of financial accountability procedures in 1975, the Commission stressed the importance of full information and suggested that the financial details of non-government schools receiving grants be publicly available in view of the high levels of government funding.[5] This information was recognised as much less demanding than the political accountability of Ministers for Education who must answer to the public for their stewardship. The Commission had found it difficult to acquire from both government and Catholic systems the facts it felt to be essential to allow extensive rational debate on educational policy issues, but it could not challenge the situation becuase there was no power in the States Grants Acts to make the supplying of information a condition of the flow of funds. In particular it wished to receive early data on the intended use of grants so that it could discuss priorities before program implementation. It therefore recommended that:

> ' the Australian Government make a condition of the 1976-78 Programs that State and Catholic authorities ensure an adequate flow of information to the Commission and to the public, on the intended and actual use of Australian Government grants.' [6]

The Commission further developed its theme of devolution of responsiblity in this report, advocating decentralisation of decision-making to the local level and increased participation of members of the local community. It maintained that 'the most effective accountability is one which involves both parents and teachers in making decisions for the results of which they are mutually responsible'.[7]

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3. Ibid, para. 2.4.
4. Ibid, para. 2.19.
5. Schools Commission. Report for the Triennium 1976-78. Canberra, AGPS, 1975,para. 3.44.
6. Ibid, para. 19.27.
7. Ibid, para. 11.10.

The 1979-81 Report

In its 1979-81 report,the Commission recognised that the economic downturn which had brought attacks on public education expenditure placed greater emphasis on the effective use of resources to improve the quality of schooling.[8] It rejected the notion that this could be measured simply by student scores on standard tests or brought about by strengthened external control and supervision of schools. Expectations about the skills, knowledge and understanding that schools had a special responsibilityto impart to young people were considered to be much the same for all children. However, the Commission maintained that the most effective ways of teaching would vary according to location, patterns of out-of-school life and individual differences. It saw the movement of decision-making towards the school as providing important opportunities for school improvement, since setting objectives and planning to meet them were more frequently set at local level. The Commission saw the framework of centralised political accountability within which schools in public systems operate as involving considerable external supervision of schools, but recognised that this was now more often exercised in an advisory rather than a judgement capacity In addition, the trend was for accountability to be extended outwards to parents as it became more accepted that community involvement in decision-making could result in more responsible programming and more commitment to succeed.

In summary, since its establishment the Commission has been concerned with financial accountability for all of its grants, with a stricter reporting process sought from the non-government schools than the public sector. It has sought educational accountability by encouraging evaluation both as a means of improving schools and as an integral part of all of its Programs, believing that ongoing action will be improved by the analysis of experience. Emphasis has been given to promoting more open and locally based decision-making, and building teacher, parent and community participation in policy-making and action as a means of ensuring that a growing proportion of the Australian community both understands and is involved in the education process. Political accountability has been an annual concern of the Commission as it has given attention to reporting to the Minister and Parliament, disseminating widely these reports and other publications, and broadening the awareness and participation of parents and community members. These views on account-ability have influenced its practice in the Disadvantaged Schools Program.

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8. Schools Commission. Report for the Triennium 1979-81. Canberra, Schools Commission, 1978, para. 1.4.

THE DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS PROGRAM

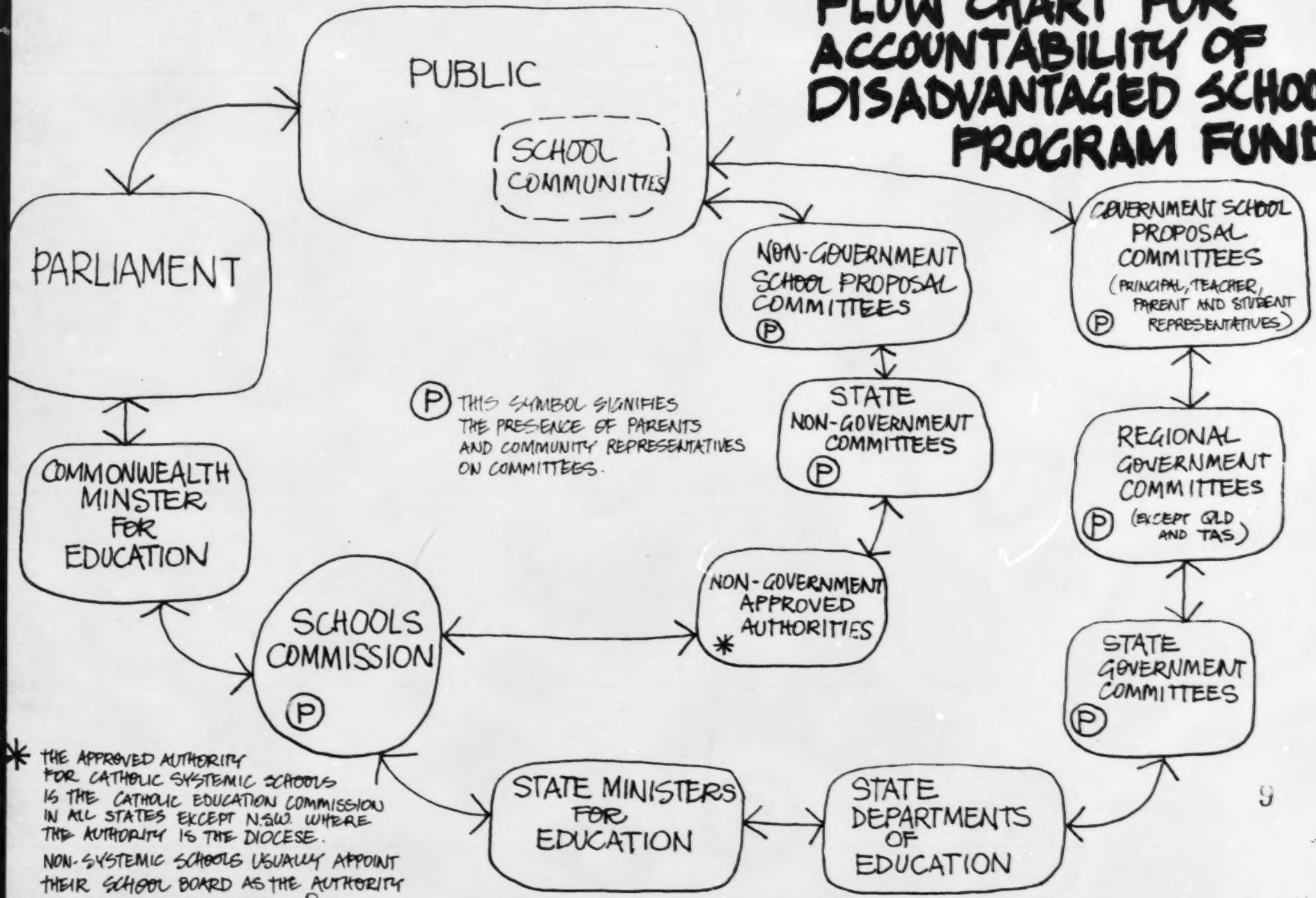
Financial Accountability

The Disadvantaged Schools Program is only concerned with declared disadvantaged schools and country areas. State Ministers declare government disadvantaged schools and the Commonwealth Minister declares non-government disadvantaged schools and disadvantaged country areas, on the advice of Catholic Education Commissions (Catholic schools), Planning and Finance Committees (non-systemic schools) and State Ministers for Education (country areas) respectively. Funds are legislated for the Program under Acts of Parliament. In 1979, the legislation governing the Disadvantaged Schools Program is the States Grants (Schools Assistance) Act 1978. Figure 1 illustrates the flow of accountability from school communities to the public through the Commonwealth Parliament, recognising that the accountability process and the flow of information and advice is not one way, the advisory and administrative machinery are important to the accountability process and the public is involved at several levels through participation in decision making.

At the local school community level, teachers, parents and older students, through a process of decision-making, develop proposals which are submitted to regional or State disadvantaged schools committees. Regional committees have been established in the larger States and systems to assist local disadvantaged schools to finalise proposals and then make recommendations to the State committees. State and area committees have been set up to administer disadvantaged country areas. With respect to government schools and country areas each State Minister for Education is responsible for approving the funding of projects recommended to him by the State committees. Funds are requested on a quarterly basis from the Schools Commission. In the case of non-government schools the approved authorities submit proposals for funding to the Commission on a project by project basis. The authorities ensure that applications for funds are in the spirit of the Program and the Commission confirms this before recommending to the Commonwealth Minister that he approve funding for these projects.

Following completion of the grant period (for 1979 grants this is not later than 30 June 1980) the State Education Department or Treasury submits to the Commonwealth Minister a statement signed by an authorised person (usually the Chief Finance Officer of the Department or the State Auditor-General) which certifies that the legislated funds have been applied to government disadvantaged schools or to country areas. In the case of non-government disadvantaged schools the approved authorities are required to provide a certificate completed by a qualified accountant which states that the money disbursed under the relevant Act has been spent for the purpose specified in the legislation on disadvantaged schools under

FLOW CHART FOR ACCOUNTABILITY OF DISADVANTAGED SCHOOL PROGRAM FUNDS


PUBLIC
SCHOOL COMMUNITIES
PARLIAMENT
COMMONWEALTH MINSTER FOR EDUCATION
SCHOOLS COMMISSION (P)
STATE MINISTERS FOR EDUCATION
STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION
NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOL PROPOSAL COMMITTEES (P)
STATE NON-GOVERNMENT COMMITTEES (P)
NON-GOVERNMENT APPROVED AUTHORITIES *
GOVERNMENT SCHOOL PROPOSAL COMMITTEES (PRINCIPAL, TEACHER, PARENT AND STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES) (P)
REGIONAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEES (P) (EXCEPT QLD AND TAS)
STATE GOVERNMENT COMMITTEES (P)

(P) THIS SYMBOL SIGNIFIES THE PRESENCE OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES ON COMMITTEES.

* THE APPROVED AUTHORITY FOR CATHOLIC SYSTEMIC SCHOOLS IS THE CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION IN ALL STATES EXCEPT N.S.W. WHERE THE AUTHORITY IS THE DIOCESE.
NON-SYSTEMIC SCHOOLS USUALLY APPOINT THEIR SCHOOL BOARD AS THE AUTHORITY FOR PAYMENT PURPOSES.

their jurisdiction. The approved authorities are required to attach to each certificate a schedule, also signed by the accountant, indicating the distribution of the total grants made to disadvantaged schools for which they are responsible and including a brief description of the projects funded. This information then forms part of an overall report on the financial assistance granted to each State which is prepared by the Schools Commission for the Commonwealth Minister for Education and which is eventually tabled in Parliament. 9

In the case of non-government schools, where comprehensive details about expenditure are provided, financial accountability has been most satisfactory in relation to government disadvantaged schools it has sometimes been disappointing. There has been a reluctance in some States to make information available or to report publicly on the Program. Most States include minimal detail in the required financial statements; some provide no breakup of expenditure, others present only the briefest of summaries. The inconsistency among States' reports and the lateness of reporting could weaken the political base of the Program in the future. Although it could be argued that present arrangements over-emphasise the accounting of finance, I consider that the requirements for annual reporting on expenditure have done little to promote the effectiveness of the Program. While the procedures give some appearance of control by the Commission they do not appear to have a significant effect on local practice.

Educational Accountability

In financial and compliance accountability it is relatively easy to determine who is accountable, to whom, for what, how and why, because dollars and cents can be counted and statements are straight forward. However, when the notion of accountability is extended to include efficiency and effectiveness the situation becomes more complex. Educational accountability involves demonstrating that the resources applied have contributed to the achievement of stated goals, and where these are long term it is often not possible to point to success in the short term.

The three stated objectives of the Disadvantaged Schools Program are to improve learning outcomes, to provide a more relevant curriculum, and to bring schools and their communities closer together. Other objectives include: to identify and select schools drawing a large proportion of their student body from socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods; to encourage the development of self appraisal by the teaching staff of these schools in liaison with parent and student bodies; and to disseminate information about innovative approaches to improving learning outcomes which may be applicable in other school settings.

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9. See for example, Schools Commission. Report: Financial Assistance Granted to Each State: States Grants (Schools Assistance) Act 1976 Canberra, AGPS, 1978.

There are obvious difficulties in specifying and weighting objectives for the Program. First, general objectives have to be translated into quite specific ones. There are different levels of specificity from the Commonwealth Government to the State Government, regional committee and finally to the individual school. Specific objectives have to refer to specific practical situations and must take into consideration the type of, and scope for, decision-making appropriate and possible at each level. Second, groups and individuals at various levels will give a different weighting for different objectives. Third, each school ultimately determines what activities it will implement, and fourth, the priorities for different objectives will vary as circumstances change.

Despite these difficulties it is important to make an attempt to express the objectives in quantifiable terms. For example, take the general objective 'to bring schools and their communities closer together'. Specific objectives arising from this might be 'to increase parent attendance at parent/teacher nights','to involve parents in reading programs', or 'to increase teacher knowledge and involvement in the community through visits to students' homes and attendance at community functions'. These objectives can be measured; for example, by counting the changes in attendance at parent/teacher nights, the hours of parent/student contact, the reduced adult/child ratio in the classroom, the number of home visits.

At national level educational accountability is achieved through general reviews of the progress of the Program by the National Task Force and the Commission. A formal evaluation of the implementation of the Program from 1974 to 1976 has been carried out by an independent investigator with the cooperation of the States. [10] The national director meets twice a year with systems coordinators for information exchange and discussion of reports on particular aspects of the Program by the administering authorites. Examples of effective projects are disseminated through national and State publications."

At the State level coordinators have been appointed at relatively senior levels to oversee the administration of the Program. They work to State committees, which constantly monitor and make judgements about the effectiveness of funding as well as the administrative processes. The committees include representatives of parent and teacher organisations who have connections through their own channels with people at school and national levels. Evaluation reports have been published by some committees and others have commissioned research on Program effectiveness.

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10. Cassidy, C. Implementation of the Disadvantaged Schools Program 1974-76. Schools Commission Evaluation Studies. Canberra, Schools Commission, 1978.

11. See, for example, Schools Commission. Doing Something About It. Canberra, AGPS, 1978, and Learning to Share. Canberra, Schools Commission, 1978.

One example of educational accountability at regional or area level in the Program is the system of annual public reporting adopted by the Western Wimmera Area Committee of the Victorian Disadvantaged Country Areas Program. At the first public meeting held to establish the area committee, a clause was written into the terms of reference to require the committee to report to a public meeting once a year. At this meeting on 16 July 1979 the Chairman commented, 'This is not an Annual Meeting concerned with audited statements of receipts and expenses, the election of office-bearers and reports, lengthy speeches or reams of correspondence. This is an exercise in accountability and an opportunity to raise questions and to answer questions about the effectiveness of the Program'. [12] This particular area committee has three representatives from each of four sub-areas in the region and one from the Catholic Education Office. Fifty per cent of members must be community representatives. The committee examines all submissions from the sub-areas and forwards successful ones to the State Country Education Planning Committee for approval and funding. No submission is looked at by the area committee unless it has been approved at the sub-area level.

At the school level, involvement of school communities is intended to ensure a continuing development in ideas for school improvement and the evaluation of particular initiatives. Schools are required to examine their educational programs, define objectives for improvement, and progress towards achieving them. Ongoing evaluation is required as progress reports are submitted to regional or State committees for further funding. My visits to disadvantaged schools and country areas across Australia confirm my view that the involvement of school communities has had positive effects both on the participation patterns through greater involvement of parents, and on education awareness through greater communiciation among staff and community about educational issues. Teachers report that joint planning among them has ensured program continuity and improved teaching practice, while management practice has benefitted from ongoing evaluation.

However, it must be admitted that in some disadvantaged schools educational accountability still has a fairly low priority. It is possible for schools that are only interested in getting grants to go through the process of reporting and obtain their funds, without producing the improvements that occur when both staff and parents make planning a year-round endeavour. At State and national levels, neither the State nor the Commonwealth has yet conducted cost effectiveness studies to assess whether the levels of funding, the types of project or the duration of implementation are critical to improving learning outcomes. On the credit side assistance to help schools to consider alternative ways of achieving their objectives or to determine whether the objectives themselves are attainable is now less difficult to obtain, and increased community participation has ensured greater educational accountability.

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12. Hayter, G. Chairman's Report to the Western Wimmera Area Committee. Casterton, 1979.

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Political accountability

Some States consistently fail to recognise publicly the source of funding for projects implemented with Commonwealth funds in disadvantaged schools and country areas. A three months survey of Australia-wide press coverage in 1979 indicated that less than 20 per cent of reports of such projects acknowledged the Commonwealth Government or the Schools Commission as a source of funds or a contributor to the project. Some States publish reports of research projects funded through the Program or lists of project descriptions with no mention of the Commonwealth or the Commission. This is a dangerous practice when it is realised that continued Commonwealth funding of government schools and country areas may well depend on the political support engendered by good publicity about the effectiveness of programs. Non-government schools, on the other hand, are generally quick to acknowledge Commonwealth funding.

One of the promising and less formal aspects of political accountability is the wide cross section of interest groups represented on State, regional and school committees. Members come from varied backgrounds and have a responsibility to report their decisions and the programs which result to their organisations and the community at large. There are opportunities to share information and give advice in regular State and regional conferences.

In summary, financial accountability in the Disadvantaged Schools Program works very well for non-government schools, but there is room for improvement for government schools. Educational accountability is achieved through community involvement and school-level evaluation. Political accountability, although neglected in some government systems, has improved through informal networks which work well in giving publicity to the direct relationship between the Commission and grant recipients.

ACCOUNTABILITY TO DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

Now I would like to focus specifically on what schools in the Disadvantaged Schools Program are doing for their major clients - the students and their parents. Disadvantaged students also have a right to an education which fits them for work, leisure and citizenship; their parents have a right to access to information about the education their children are receiving; and teachers and administrators are responsible to both groups as well as the wider community to ensure that the education they provide takes into account the needs, wishes and interests of students, parents and the community.

The major goal of the Disadvantaged Schools Program is to improve the learning outcomes of children from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds and thus increase their life choices. The Program has been based on a number of assumptions: that regardless of their backgrounds, all children can learn providing attention is paid to pre-conditions for it; that basic literacy, numeracy, oracy and reasoning skills, and a broadening of experience are essential to competence, self esteem and survival in adult life; that schools as they are presently structured do not always assist poor students to gain these competencies; and that positive discrimination is necessary to assist schools to make radical changes in educational approaches. A fundamental aim of the Program has been to equip disadvantaged children with the power, through education, to enter and share fully in the benefits of society as a matter of social justice. Since 1974 approximately $147.3m has been spent on schools and country areas in the Program. Public demands for accounting for this expenditure will go beyond the principle of social justice and be in terms of factors which can be measured, such as increases in educational attainment, relative to the performance of other children from advantaged backgrounds. Thus, while accountability is a broader concept than evaluation, it obviously embraces evaluation and makes some discussion of school-level evaluation essential.

From the Program's inception there has been an emphasis in disadvantaged schools on school-level evaluation as the constant monitoring of educational programs in relation to clearly defined objectives, and modification of those objectives where necessary. This involves pre-planned, continuous information-gathering to identify strengths and weaknesses in a program and allow adjustments to be made. Evaluation in this context is part of the every day process of curriculum development and implementation, it contributes to the professional involvement of teachers, and is better informed when parents are involved.

The Commission has rejected the narrow concentration on improving basic skills as the central index of success which has been a strong feature of overseas programs - in particular the American ESEA Title I program which targets funds on underachieving students rather than schools. Both the National Institute of Education, which has undertaken a major study of Title 1 grants, and the Stanford Research Institute's study of the local use of program evaluations concluded that the practice of constant monitoring of basic skills achievement alone is not the most effective means of improving them and has had little impact on subsequent action in the school. 13. This has been because the evaluation was designed by people beyond the school in order to satisfy compliance requirements, and because teachers' goals were broader than improving basic skills. Teachers believed that the important factors benefitting students were greater parental interest, more attention to the needs of individual students and the presence of more adults in the school. Furthermore, the constant

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13. National Institute of Education. Evaluating Compensatory Education: an interim report on the NIE Compensatory Education Study. Washington, NIE, 1976. Also six reports in 1977. And David, Jane L., and Sol H. Pelarin . Research on the effectiveness of Compensatory Education Programs: a reanalysis of data. California, Stanford Research Institute, 1977.

measurement and public ranking of students in the American programs diverts attention from the more fundamental changes in the curriculum as a whole, which the Commission advocates. These include the necessity to change teacher attitudes through their engagement with parents and students in programs which seek to develop the self concepts and competencies of students, to change the kinds of understandings schools have valued in the past, and to increase the interaction schools have with their communities, reducing the alienation between them.

A recent British study by Rutter et al has confirmed that good schools can change learning outcomes for socially disadvantaged children, a proposition which has been in disfavour since the work of Coleman, Jencks and Plowden concluded that schools could do little to modify the influences of the home.14 These studies came to those conclusions because they asked questions about school performance and gathered the kinds of evidence to answer them predominately from standardised tests which depended on the single measure of verbal ability, rather than measuring the features of school life which have the strongest effect on performance. These include the values and internal life of schools, teaching styles, the quality of school organisation, the uses of discipline and, in particular, the relationships between students and teachers in the classroom; all variables which Rutter and his colleagues showed to have decisive effects on educational results for disadvantaged students. Most of these characteristics automatically receive attention when teachers, parents and students in schools are encouraged to examine school processes and seek to improve them.

STRATEGIES FOR FACILITATING EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY AT SCHOOL LEVEL

Guidelines and Consultant Services

In my view, the emphasis on school-level evaluation as a means of school improvement in the Australian Program has been the correct policy. I believe that additional attention could be given at national and State levels to assisting and supporting school communities in their approaches to evaluation as one method of educational accountability. Since 1978 national support has been given for the widespread dissemination of results of good practice and to promoting strategies for facilitating accountability to clients through these self-evaluation processes. Most State systems and some regional committees have produced guidelines to assist schools in evaluation activities, suggesting questions to address at the beginning, during, and at the end phases of program evaluations, providing practical examples of how to measure both processes and outcomes, and suggesting available consultants and services. In Tasmania the Commission has recently funded a study, organised by the State Program Committee in conjunction with the Research Branch of the Tasmanian Education Department, which provides an experienced consultant to work with six disadvantaged schools to assist them to focus on key evaluation issues, select and collect information, and modify their programs. The study will provide the Committee with information, on the evaluation techniques it should encourage in other disadvantaged schools.

14. Rutter, Michael et al. Fifteen Thousand Hours. London, Open Books, 1979.

Expansion of Evaluation Measures

While I believe traditional measures of student achievement and attitudes should be undertaken to contribute to a profile of each student's mastery of skills, some measurement data which teachers do not often think about can be easily obtained and give useful indicators to progress. For example, people often say that since the Program has been operating there has been less vandalism in the school grounds. At one school in South Australia the headmistress was able to report that in the year prior to the school's participation in the Program in 1974 there had been nine occasions when police had to be called to the school because of breaking and entering, yet in 1978 there was not a single case of vandalism. The teacher attributed the change to different community attitudes - 'it is our school'. This attitude reflected a high degree of community involvement in the program. In an attempt to measure development of interest in reading in one New South Wales school, the parent librarian has a record of the books borrowed by every child over four years. This record shows improvement in attitudes to reading as measured by significant increases in the numbers and kinds of books borrowed. Parent attendance at meetings can be measured at the beginning of the program and then after its development to see if there is any change. Teacher morale can be estimated by teacher turnover and teacher absences. A Victorian study reported the testing of a sample of schools in one region and discovered that teacher absences in declared disadvantaged schools were significantly less than in schools which were not declared disadvantaged. 15 Reduced truancy often indicates greater student and parental satisfaction with school experience.

Inservice

Two major constraints at the school level for effective educational accountability are the lack of teacher time for evaluation and sometimes teachers' and parents' lack of the necessary skills. The move towards the adaptation of the curriculum to suit the needs of particular children and thus more individualised instruction creates demands for greater precision in evaluation at a more individual level. Program funds can be used to buy time for evaluation; for example, stenographic assistance to type taped interviews and technical expertise for videotaping can be hired. One teacher might be released for, say, four hours teaching time per week so that he or she can be a scribe of the experiences of school personnel. Community personnel can also be of some assistance.
I believe that if people do not have the skills required for evaluation processes they can and should be acquired. Teachers and parents need support to raise their competence in the school environment to improve educational programs. State systems across Australia are providing opportunities for people to visit schools which have had particular success and to share and discuss what they are doing with outsiders on a regular basis. Parents are participating in courses which improve their knowledge of the school environment

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15. Rodgers, Terry. Evaluation and Research Studies: a synopsis of findings Melbourne, Victorian Department of Education, 1977.

and enable them to participate in planning. Consultative specialist support staff are being made available to act as 'critical friends' in the evaluation process. La Trobe and Queensland Universities are examples of institutions where tertiary personnel are being engaged with school staffs in evaluating programs.

Community Participation

Perhaps the most important way of facilitating educational accountability to local communities, especially to parents and students, is to increase community participation. Even though the existing committee structure for the disbursement of funds and evaluation of programs could be said to be inefficient and uneconomical in terms of the time involved in reaching agreement and making decisions, it does ensure the involvement of parents and community members in the planning, development and evaluation of programs.

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Developing Accountability Mechanisms

At the national and State levels I believe there could be further development of appropriate accountability mechanisms in the Disadvantaged Schools Program. A visiting American educator, Michael Kirst, recently stated that accountability mechanisms in federal programs should improve local delivery of services, enhance the chances of bringing about significant and lasting change, and contribute to more effective decisions by external agencies about the allocation of limited funds. [16] He indicated that the features which seemed to characterise effective innovative efforts in America were mutual adaptation between the project and the organisation, significant ongoing involvement of school level practitioners in designing and implementing the project, and support from the system. Kirst indicated that summative evaluations based largely on test scores had been of little value in making programs more effective or in helping administrators to make funding decisions. He favoured on-site visits by program representatives as a better means of getting feedback on projects and information to program administrators. In Australia the importance of a reliable and relevant information flow on development in the Program has now been recognised by the establishment of a national ad hoc group, supported by both State systems and the Commission, to decide a format for annual reporting on the Program across the nation. Consideration should also be given to facilitating on-site

16. Michael Kirst. Address to the Secretariat of the Schools Commission, 1978.

visits by Commission personnel to give additional feedback on projects. In the past a limited number of visits to schools and country areas has been made by the Program Director, and Commissioners have visited some disadvantaged schools as part of the school visit program for the current study of the educational experiences of 15 and 16 year olds: however, there is as yet no planned ongoing visiting schedule.

Selection of Schools

The Program directs funds to schools serving poor populations which have high proportions of educationally disadvantaged students in them. Accountability requires that funds are indeed being spent on schools most in need of assistance. School selection is still a matter of controversy in most States. Originally the Commission gave States a list of schools which were measured as the most disadvantaged on a socio-economic scale derived from 1971 Census data. States were asked to select schools to participate in the Program using this list together with local knowledge of schools in the system. Since 1974 most States have developed their own indices for measuring disadvantage, based on such factors as socio-economic level of students, migrancy, Aboriginality, student turnover and achievement levels. Although little research has been done in the area, the few studies indicate that selected schools do contain students with the lowest educational achievement. [17] Analyses are needed to determine the differences which exist among schools in different areas in terms of both student outcomes and provision and to confirm that schools presently in the Program are those most in need of assistance. A national committee is being established to review the index of disadvantage using 1976 Census data and based on the experience gained by the systems over five years of participation in the Program.

Cost-effectiveness Issues

Neither the Commonwealth nor the States has yet given serious attention to analysing whether there is an optimal level of funding to enable program success. In Australia the additional funds provided through the Program amount to some $50 per student compared to approximately $300 per student in the American Title 1 Program. Because of different funding mechanisms in some schools, payments in Australia can be as low as $2 per student and in others as high as $150. Although there has been an emphasis on the process of decision-making itself as the key factor in quality proposals, an analysis should be made of the relative effectiveness of various funding strategies, for example, the employment of specialist staff as against teacher aides. Cost effective analyses could be useful inputs to decisions on whether to expand, maintain or reduce the size of the Program or to adjust its structure. One

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17. See, for example, Goldman, R. and G. Rowley. The Development of an Index of Educational Priority for City Schools. Canberra. ERDC, 1977.

constraint on this approach is the difficulty often experienced in assessing the contribution the disadvantaged schools grant has made to an educational objective when a school is receiving money from several sources: the normal resource allocation from the State Education Department, migrant education funds, general recurrent grants, and perhaps an innovations grant. The Program can often be said to be working most effectively when the project is integrated into the total school program.

Over-emphasis on Limited Range of Compentencies

In my view, uninformed public demands for teachers to be accountable through their results in terms of student achievement in a limited range of skills could lead to dangerous outcomes. Teachers could be forced to limit educational programs to examinable subjects and to prepare students for tests to meet externally imposed standards without regard for students' interests, needs and abilities or recognition of individual differences. In these circumstances, teachers would be strongly influenced in their selection of content and method of teaching. The inevitable pressure to adopt centrally developed curriculum would preclude the community from being involved in designing relevant programs to meet local needs. Moreover, the stress on assisting children to attain quantifiable and measurable educational results could lead to the neglect of other important aspects of education including the capacity of children to think critically and creatively, to interpret argument and to appreciate human values. D'Cruz has pointed out that activities valuable in themselves, chosen to involve students' imagination, knowledge, beliefs, will and emotions lead to outcomes such as understanding, critical reflection and judgments which often defy operational description and quantification by any known tests of the activities, either of teachers or students. 18

Conflicting Goals

It cannot be assumed that all groups involved in education will have the same goals, Sometimes there is a conflict of goals between those of, say, students, parents, teachers and employers. To avoid the most powerful groups having ultimate control I believe it is important that all views are aired, that information is readily available and that decisions are made on the basis of some agreed outcome. The accountability process will be subject to partisan approaches if the realities of choice and power are not recognised and deliberately countered. The establishment of representative committees at all levels of the Program has been aimed at ensuring that many views are heard before decisions about the Program's objectives and processes are made.

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18. D'Cruz, J.V. Accountability in Education: The Concept and Its Implications. In D'Cruz, J.V. and P.J. Sheehan (Eds) The Renewal of Australian Schools. Melbourne, Advocate Press, 1975, p.100.

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CONCLUSION

A recent Australian study has argued that one of the underlying assumptions of Australian education is that -

> "It should give bright children every educational opportunity, encourage them to have confidence in their own ability and motivate them to aspire high and work hard so that they leave school accredited to enter tertiary institutions and ultimately high status occupations. It is not so concerned with less bright children; it gives the high school simply the residual function of trying to ensure that these children reach a minimum level of competence in literacy and numeracy, that they are steered away from unrealistic goals and motivated to enough self-discipline and industry to free the school to concentrate on their more favoured peers". 19

I believe that demands for accountability have served a valuable function in stimulating public discussion about education and its underlying assumptions, and changing the emphasis to the outcomes of schools for all children including the disadvantaged rather than the inputs alone. Nevertheless, community pressure for accountability in terms of measurements by achievement tests of a limited number of competencies could work against the genuine efforts and concern of many school communities to prepare all of their students for adult life in the late twentieth century.

Johnson has pointed out that all Australians are accountable for the education of all other Australians; that society as a whole has an interest in the physical, intellectual, emotional and moral strengths and weaknesses of each one of us. 20. Because society has this interest in the quality of its members, it will require educators to be accountable for more than those attributes which can be measured, particularly such 'moral characteristics as honesty, compassion, sensitivity to others, loyalty, fortitude, justice, self control and concern'. He also rightly pointed out that accountability is a two way process and society is accountable to teachers and schools for 'a measure of trust' as well as financial and moral support.

This paper has argued that of the three kinds of accountability discussed, financial, educational and political, the most important aspect for further development in the Disadvantaged Schools Program is educational accountability. Both community involvement and school level evaluation are seen to be important strategies for facilitating accountability for the education of disadvantaged children. However, I believe that accountability for improving the futures of disadvantaged children rests with more than the schools. The family, the peer group, the church and the community all have some degree of influence and it is impossible to compartmentalise these influences. All have responsibility to provide optimum conditions for worthwhile learning to occur. Nevertheless, it is generally the school which is easiest to identify in the educational process, and for disadvantaged students perhaps the point at which most effective intervention can take place to equip students with the knowledge,

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19. Martin, Jean and Phil Meade. The Educational Experiences of Sydney High School Students. Canberra, AGPS, 1979

20 Johnson, R. Accountability: Society's viewpoint. In Chippindale P.R. and Paula V. Wilkes. Accountability in Education. University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1977.

skills and understandings that are the school's business to impart. All children, no matter what their background, have the right to access to the power to control their circumstances and act effectively in the world.

Shirley Randell
23 August, 1979